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UM GYMNASTS HOST TRIANGULAR MARCH 7

In their final competition before regionals, the University of Montana gymnasts host cross-state rival Montana State and Eastern Washington University. The meet will take place in Adams Field House Annex at UM on Friday, March 7 at 7 p.m.

MSU, which defeated the Grizzlies earlier this season in Bozeman, should easily win this week, according to UM coach Terry Hamilton, with "two super all-arounds" leading the way.

"I doubt we can touch them," Hamilton said, "but they (MSU) are awfully fun to watch."

The coach is more optimistic about his team's chances with the other competitors. "I expect to be right next to Eastern Washington," Hamilton said.

In last week's quadrangular competition in Cheney, Wash., Montana finished last. Hamilton was unhappy with the judging, however.

"What was really sad to us was that the kids performed quite well," he said. "I felt we were really cheated."

Eastern Washington took first in the contest, followed by Seattle Pacific, which the Grizzlies had defeated a week earlier, the University of Idaho and Montana.

Montana's Wendy Honchell captured first on uneven parallel bars and fifth in all-around. Her success on bars can be credited to the addition of a more difficult dismount to her routine.

Hamilton is generally happy with his team's improvement. Each individual has reached her potential on individual routines, he said. Many of the women are adding more difficult tricks, which accounts for Hamilton's optimism toward this week's meet and the regional competition.

(more)

Honchell, who has been UM's top gymnast all season, has added tougher moves to all of her routines. If she hits balance beam well, Hamilton believes she could take first in the event this Friday. The freshman from Littleton, Colo., is a pretty gymnast to watch and incorporates dance into her floor exercise routine well.

Another freshman all-around, Mercedes Gonzalez, has steadily improved all year. The Vancouver, Wash., native will be throwing one of the most difficult vaults seen in this region at this week's contest. Hamilton believes Gonzalez has the drive and ability to take her to nationals by her junior year.

Veteran Kari Shepherd is "finally injury-free" according to Hamilton, and has added a more advanced dismount to her bars routine, which should improve her score. Shepherd, a sophomore from Anchorage, Alaska, was out earlier in the season with a sprained ankle and then pulled back muscles.

Primarily a vaulting specialist, Kit Curry has also been competing on balance beam and uneven parallel bars to add depth to the small Montana squad. Last week the Missoula freshman scored 7.7 on the bars for her season high.

Two other gymnasts boosting the Grizzly effort are freshman Kim Kins and senior Judy Carlson. Kins works vaulting, balance beam and floor exercise, while Carlson has consistently improved her uneven parallel bars routine.

All-around Shawn Leary will compete in only two events this week while trying to recover from a sprained ankle. Hamilton said that Leary will not be vaulting or competing in floor exercise so that she will be completely healthy for regionals.

One other Grizzly who will be missed is Cathy Sowl, a freshman from Anchorage, Alaska. Sowl, one of Montana's top all-arounds, is out for the remainder of the season with a shoulder injury.

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